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THE DEPENDENCE OF THE PROPHETS UPON HISTORY.

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THINKING men in every age are compelled to face the problem as to how ancient creeds are to be harmonized with present facts. The prophets of Israel were no exception to this rule. They wished to hold fast the faith of their forefathers, but they lived under very different historical conditions; they were obliged, therefore, to seek a theology by which they might reconcile old belief with a new environment. In order to understand the genesis of their conceptions, we must look first at the religion which they inherited and then at their own historical situation.

The cardinal doctrine of the Hebrew religion, a doctrine which it inherited from primitive Semitic belief, was the existence of a "covenant" between the nation and its deity. Yahweh was the God of Israel. He was its patron and protector, it was his servant and worshiper. He had chosen it to be his peculiar people, he had delivered it out of Egypt, to him alone it must bring its sacrifices and offerings, and he in return promised to bless it and to deliver it from its enemies.

As a result of the conquest of Canaan, the breaking of the Philistine yoke, the victories of David, and the glorious reign of Solomon, the doctrine of the covenant developed into the belief that Yahweh had appointed Israel a career of conquest on the earth. All her enemies were to be defeated before her, and she was to become a world-empire like Egypt or Babylon. This belief, however, was soon rudely shaken through the division of the kingdom and the consequent oppression of Israel by her neighbors. Egyptians, Edomites, and Syrians in turn afflicted the people of Yahweh. Following them the formidable Assyrian empire began to rise into view. The glowing anticipations

of the fathers as to what Yahweh would do for Israel were disappointed. Men could not help asking what had become of the covenant, by which Yahweh had bound himself to defend and bless his chosen people.

The solution of this difficulty the early prophets found in the doctrine of a "day of Yahweh." The name originated apparently as a designation of times of victory. Out of the recognition of "days of Yahweh" there gradually grew up the conception of a single "day of Yahweh," that is, a particular time in the future, when Yahweh would give Israel a decisive victory over all its enemies. Although now he tarried in the vindication of his people, there would come a time when he would supernaturally intervene to inaugurate a new era. He would then appear in power to deliver Israel from its oppressors and to give it the victory over all its enemies. This doctrine must have been an element of the older prophecy, for it appears already fully developed and generally recognized in the time of the first literary prophets.

A still greater difficulty in the way of belief in the persistence of the covenant between Yahweh and Israel emerged in the days of Amos and his successors through the moral degeneracy of Israel. The older prophets had had to face the problem, why Yahweh did not *at once* save his people; the later prophets had to face the problem, how Yahweh *could at all* save a nation that did not deserve to be saved.

The eighth century B. C. was a period of religious and of social revolution. The interval of peace between the Syrian and the Assyrian wars fostered commerce and industry. Close mercantile relations with other nations led to the worship of foreign divinities and to a mingling of foreign religious rites with the worship of Yahweh. Wealth increased with the attendant evils of luxury and of license. The aristocrats plundered and oppressed the poor, and so controlled the courts that it was impossible to obtain justice. Industry demoralized the national character through its massing of the population in cities. Vice was frightfully prevalent, drunkenness was on the increase, the old simplicity of Israel's pastoral and agricultural life was gone, and

in its place had come a degenerate Canaanite civilization reeking with moral corruption. Israel was declining and must fall a prey to the first strong enemy that should attack it. It was, Amos perceived, like a basket of over-ripe fruit that was just ready to rot.

These facts were patent to everyone, but Israel as a nation refused to believe that they portended disaster. Taking its stand on the old doctrine of the covenant, it maintained that this guaranteed its safety, regardless of its moral character (Am. 5 : 14 ; Mic. 3 : 11). So long as it continued to worship Yahweh and to bring him his due offerings, he was bound to save it. So confident was it of the correctness of this view that it feared nothing from the future, but longed for the coming of the "day of Yahweh," when all its enemies should be overthrown (Am. 5 : 18 f. ; Isa. 5 : 19).

The prophets, however, were unable to share in this optimistic view, on account of their deeper conviction of the righteousness of Yahweh. The primitive religion of Israel was not wholly unethical ; still, in it the ethical conception of Yahweh was outweighed by the tutelary conception. It was not until late in the life of the nation, in consequence of a long historical experience, that the full significance of the righteousness of Yahweh began to be apprehended. The fate of the Canaanites emphasized Yahweh's hatred of immorality, and the whole history of Israel served to reënforce this lesson. The patriotic effort to keep the ancient religion of Israel pure from admixture with Baal-worship led the prophets to lay an increasing emphasis upon Yahweh's most characteristic attribute. As a result of this process the belief continually gained ground among the better men of Israel that Yahweh's chief demand of Israel was righteousness. The "instructions" of the priests became less ceremonial and more ethical ; the prophets ceased to gratify mere curiosity and became preachers of righteousness ; the "wise" gave their sayings more and more of a moral tone ; and the historians wrote the epic of Israel's origin from a distinctly ethical-religious point of view. Into this spiritual heritage the prophets of the eighth century entered. In them the

slowly growing apprehension that Yahweh was righteous and that he demanded righteousness from Israel reached its culmination. They were not the inventors of the ethical conception of Yahweh, but they were the men in whom the ethical conception first began to outweigh the tutelary conception.

Each of them saw in the signs of the times, or in the experiences of his own life, fresh evidence of the moral exaltation of Yahweh, and found in this vision his call to be a prophet. Amos perceived that calamity had already begun to fall upon Israel, and drew from this the inference that Yahweh's covenant relation did not annul his justice. Famine and drought, blight and pestilence, war and earthquake had come upon Israel (Am. 4:6-11). Locusts had eaten up its crops, and its springs had dried up (7:1-4). What did these disasters mean? Nothing happens without a reason. If two men walk together, they must have made an appointment; if a lion roars, it is because he has caught something; if a bird suddenly drops to the earth, it is because it has been snared; if a trumpet is blown in a city, it is because an attack has been made. So also, if evil befall a city, Yahweh must have caused it. National calamities are signs of Yahweh's displeasure against a sinful nation. This is the message that through these events Yahweh communicates to his servants, the prophets. They cannot help seeing in them the evidence that Yahweh will vindicate his righteousness. If Israel continues to be unmoved by these judgments, he will certainly bring a more fearful doom upon it. Just as a lion's roar is a signal of danger, so Yahweh's voice in history is a token to the prophet of impending disaster (Am. 3:3-8).

Hosea reached the same conclusion, although by a different intellectual process. In his love for his wife he saw a type of Yahweh's love for Israel. Through his craving for her love and fidelity he learned that Yahweh demanded also the love and fidelity of Israel. In her infidelity to him he saw a parallel to the way in which Israel had proved unfaithful to its God, and realized that, just as he could no longer live in wedlock with her, so Yahweh could no longer maintain his ancient relation with an apostate nation. Just as he must put Gomer under

restraint, so Yahweh must put Israel under the restraint of exile.

Different as the experiences of the other prophets were, they all reached the same conclusion, that righteousness was the supreme attribute of Yahweh. As they dwelt upon this thought, it became more and more evident to them that Yahweh was different in kind from all the other gods; he alone was worthy to be regarded as the God of that larger world which was now beginning to open before their view. But, if he was the universal God, then he could be expected to show no partiality to Israel above other nations that had sinned and that must be punished. If righteousness was his supreme demand, then ritual must be worthless as a means of appeasing his wrath or of winning his favor. Accordingly, the literary prophets all rejected the popular theory, and maintained that, in spite of the covenant, unless Israel repented and reformed, its doom was certain.

Holding this conviction, they were compelled to modify fundamentally the doctrine of the "day of Yahweh" as it had been proclaimed by the older prophets. Their predecessors had regarded it as exclusively a day of judgment upon the heathen for their oppression of Israel; they declared that it should also be a day of judgment of Israel itself. This new conception makes its first appearance in Amos, who, after depicting the fall of the enemies of his nation, continues with the startling message: "For three transgressions of Israel, yea for four, I will not turn back its doom" (Am. 2:6). From his time onward the prophets all declared that the "day of Yahweh" is not a joyous event to be looked forward to, but a day of distress, before which all hearts must tremble (*cf.* Am. 5:18 f.; Isa. 5:19).

What, then, was to become of the covenant? How could Yahweh maintain it, if he must give Israel up to the just penalty for its sins? This was the terrible problem that confronted the prophets in the sad days of the decline and fall of the Hebrew nation.

A natural solution of this problem would have been to take the opposite extreme from the majority and to deny that the covenant had validity longer for a people that had broken the

commandment of Yahweh. Amos came very close to this when he declared that Israel was as the Cushites to Yahweh; that he had brought up the Philistines from Caphtor and the Syrians from Kir, just as he had brought Israel up out of Egypt (Am. 9:7). To have repudiated the covenant, however, would have been to cut himself loose from the ancient faith and hope of his people. This he could not do. Though Israel was utterly unfaithful, he could not believe that Yahweh would break his promise. Degenerate as Israel was, he trusted still that it was the people of Yahweh (Am. 7:15; 8:2). Hosea was convinced of this still more strongly through the tragedy of his own life. Faithless as his wife had been, severely as he had been obliged to punish her, he was yet unable to give up his first love for her. Even so, he argued, Yahweh's love cannot abandon the people that he has once chosen, even though he must send it into exile for its sins (Hos. 3:1; 11:8-11). Isaiah, while apprehending that his preaching would have no other effect than to harden Israel, so that it should be riper for its doom, was yet confident that this could not be a finality with the covenant-keeping God, and asked, "How long, O Lord?" (Isa. 6:11).

Being unwilling to surrender either their own conviction of the unchangeability of Yahweh's righteousness or the ancient belief in the persistence of the covenant, only one other solution of the problem of their age was open to the prophets. It was to believe that through the punishments which Yahweh inflicted upon the nation it would be *reformed*, so that it might be restored once more to his favor. Harmony would then exist again between Yahweh's covenant relation and his righteousness. The prophets whose writings have been preserved all accepted this solution and based their eschatology upon it. In all of them we find the following general scheme of thought as to the way in which the divine plan will unfold in the proximate future: (1) There is to be a new manifestation of Yahweh in judgment, the "day of Yahweh;" (2) this shall result in a purification of Israel from its sin; (3) it shall effect the release of Israel from its heathen oppressors; (4) the golden age of peace and blessing shall then be inaugurated and the covenant at last be realized.

This is the so-called "prophetic program" which underlies all the prophetic writings preserved in the canon.

In the elaboration of the details of this common program the prophets depend as completely upon history as they do in the development of the program itself. Thus it comes about that, while in its main outline the Messianic hope is always the same, in its details it is constantly changing according to the environment of the prophet. To illustrate this change of form we may take up successively the several items of the prophetic program and observe how they are modified in the teaching of the individual prophets.

1. The way in which the "day of Yahweh" shall come. About 760 B.C. Amos came forward in the northern kingdom with the message that the Assyrians were to be the instrument of Israel's punishment, but in 773, 772, and 763 B.C. they had already made successful expeditions to the west, and there was every reason to suppose that they would be the dominant power of the next generation. In Hosea's day Egypt had risen to greater prominence; he, therefore, was constrained to teach that Egypt as well as Assyria should be the instrument of the divine judgment. By the time of Isaiah and Micah Egypt had sunk back into her old quiescence; they, accordingly, returned to the ground of Amos, and connected the coming of the "day of Yahweh" with the Assyrians only.

After Sennacherib's unsuccessful expedition in 701 B.C. the Assyrians were no longer the menace to Judah that they once had been. A period intervened in which the prophets were uncertain as to the means which Yahweh would use to execute his judgment upon Israel. Nahum does not mention the "day of Yahweh" in relation to Israel. Micah, chaps. 6-7, which belong to the time of Manasseh, announces a cleansing of the nation by punishment, but does not make it clear how this is to be effected.

Early in the reign of Josiah (639-608 B.C.) vast hordes of Scythians from the north burst upon western Asia. In their advance Zephaniah and Jeremiah in his earlier oracles saw the speedy coming of the "day of Yahweh." The Scythians, however, disappeared as suddenly as they came, and another world-

empire began to loom above the horizon. The new Babylonian empire, which Nabopolassar had founded in 625 B. C., overthrew Nineveh in 607, and in 604 Nebuchadrezzar inflicted a crushing defeat upon Pharaoh Necho, the Egyptian king. Forthwith Jeremiah and Habakkuk saw in the Chaldean conquest the coming of the "day of Yahweh."

Ezekiel and the Deutero-Isaiah looked for a coming of the "day of Yahweh" in connection with the release from captivity. The post-exilic prophets anticipated a shaking of the nations by war, through which Persia might fall and a new order of things be inaugurated. The author of Daniel, writing at the time of the persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes, saw in them the beginning of the end and the signs of the speedy coming of the "day of Yahweh."

2. The effect of the "day of Yahweh" upon Israel. In the time of Amos the moral degeneracy of Israel was not so complete but that he was able to believe that the Assyrian invasion would bring about a reformation. Accordingly, he predicted a shaking of the land, through which the sinners of the nation should be cast into exile, and the survivors should be led to repentance. By the time of Hosea corruption had gone so far that he no longer anticipated the escape even of a remnant, but declared that the national existence of Israel must cease in a captivity both in Egypt and in Assyria. Repentance would come only when the people were in exile, and then they should be restored from the lands whither they had been carried.

The condition of Judah in the time of Isaiah was similar to that of Israel in the time of Amos, and, accordingly, Isaiah declared that, although Judah should be reduced to the last extremity by the Assyrians, yet a remnant should repent and should escape. Jerusalem, the "Ari-el," should not be destroyed. Micah held substantially the same view, only he believed that punishment would have to go so far that Jerusalem should be destroyed (Mic. 3:12).

The author of Micah chaps. 6-7, Zephaniah, and Habakkuk likewise expected that dire calamity would suffice to reform Judah, without it being necessary for God to resort to the more

desperate remedy of exile. As morals grew worse, however, Jeremiah, like Hosea, saw that reform was impossible and announced that Jerusalem must fall before the Babylonians and its inhabitants be carried into exile. Not until they were in exile should they turn in penitence to Yahweh.

Ezekiel before the fall of Jerusalem taught the same message as Jeremiah. After that event, when penitence still failed to manifest itself, he anticipated that the heart of the nation would at last be melted by the deliverance from Babylon and the restoration to the land of promise. This hope was shared by the Deutero-Isaiah. The glorious "day of Yahweh" that should presently dawn through the victory of Cyrus would bring repentance and faith to the majority of the nation and destruction to those who still remained obstinately unbelieving.

The post-exilic prophets expected in that shaking of the nations, which was for them the "day of Yahweh," a purification of Judah, by which it should be made fit to receive the Messianic salvation. And, finally, Daniel saw in the persecutions of Antiochus the divine means by which the true Jews should be discriminated from the false, who were presently to be destroyed along with the tyrant by the manifestation of Yahweh.

3. The effect of the "day of Yahweh" upon the heathen. Amos anticipated a conquest of Syria, Philistia, Phœnicia, Edom, Ammon, and Moab by the Assyrians at the time when they should afflict Judah and Israel. From the Assyrian catastrophe the chosen people only should revive ; the others should either disappear or become subordinate to Israel. He evidently believed that in the future the Assyrians would no longer be a menace, but in what way this should come about he seems to have had no definite conception. Hosea in his picture of the Messianic age assumed that through the Assyrian and Egyptian campaigns the old enemies of Israel should be rendered harmless. Egypt and Assyria themselves should be so terrified by Yahweh's appearance to bring his people back from captivity that they should interpose no obstacle to their escape.

Isaiah anticipated a conquest of all the hostile nations, including Egypt, by Assyria, but he added the thought that, when

Assyria had fulfilled her mission as God's rod, she herself should be punished for her manifold sins. In consequence of this chastening, all the heathen nations, including Assyria itself, should turn to Yahweh and become worshipers of him along with his people Israel. From this time onward the conversion of the heathen became an integral element of Messianic prophecy.

4. The new era that shall succeed the "day of Yahweh." Amos regarded the good time coming as primarily a restoration of Israel from the devastation wrought by the Assyrians. His *summum bonum* was a supernatural increase of the fruitfulness of Canaan. Hosea, as we should expect from his deeper spiritual experience, added to these material blessings the hope of the cessation of war, of the restoration of harmony in nature, of the forgiveness of sins, and of the realization of Yahweh's love by his penitent people. Isaiah and Micah combined and amplified the teaching of Amos and of Hosea. Jeremiah first conceived the new dispensation as the making of a new covenant, whose characteristic shall be that Yahweh's commandments are no longer laid upon men from without, but are written in the heart.

In their conception of the medium through which Yahweh will bring in the blessedness of the new era the prophets differ no less widely than in their ideal of that age itself. Through all the changes and disasters of the centuries the house of David stood fast as a source of law and order, while in the northern kingdom repeated revolutions placed one dynasty after another on the throne. It was natural, in view of this, that the political hopes both of Amos and of Hosea should attach themselves to this dynasty, and that in it they should see a basis for the rehabilitation of the Hebrew nation.

The long and prosperous reign of Uzziah, in which much of the ancient vigor of Judah returned, suggested to the prophets who immediately succeeded Amos and Hosea the idea of an individual prince of the house of David who should once more raise the nation to glory. Isaiah looked for the speedy coming of a king who should be the antithesis of the weak and unbelieving Ahaz. A maiden was already with child and about to bear. His

birth should coincide with the departure of the Syrian and Ephramite kings, and, in token of Judah's escape, he should receive the name Immanuel, "God-is-with-us." Before he was old enough to distinguish between evil and good, the kingdoms of the allied monarchs should fall before the Assyrians. The child should then grow up amid the distress of the Assyrian supremacy, living upon curds and honey, the simple food of a people whose land has been wasted by war, and when he came to maturity, he should appear as a deliverer from the Assyrian yoke. Similarly, Micah declared that the prince who should come out of Bethlehem, the ancient home of David, should smite the Assyrian when he came into the land.

The Messiah did not come as the deliverer from the Assyrians, as was anticipated, and, consequently, even in Isaiah's later years, we find that the anointed king disappears from the field of prophetic anticipation. In the next generation another figure takes his place as the basis of the hope of the future, the suffering "servant of Yahweh," or the persecuted remnant of the Jews who are faithful to prophetic ideals. This conception first appears in Micah, chaps. 6-7. It grows in the teaching of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and in the Deutero-Isaiah becomes the basis of the hope of the new era.

Thus we find that both in their fundamental beliefs and in the minor details of their doctrine the prophets were dependent upon their historical environment. They were the children of their age as truly as any other writers have been. They were not ecstasies, as the Montanists believed, nor amanuenses of the Holy Spirit, as Philo and many of the church fathers believed, but were calm, sober-minded, thoughtful men, who faced the problems of their age and worked them out as best they could, like the thinkers of other races.

This is the conclusion to which we are inevitably led by an impartial study of the writings of the prophets, and yet many hesitate to accept it because it seems to them a denial of the inspiration of the prophets. If their teaching was the natural outcome of the life of the Hebrew nation, then, it is said, it cannot be the word of God. I cannot close this paper without

saying a word in regard to the way in which, it seems to me, the two conceptions may be combined.

First, then, let me call to mind the truth, which we are so apt to forget, that a recognition of natural causes does not exclude the divine causation. As believers in God we must hold that efficient causes are not inconsistent with final causes; that there may be an absolute reign of natural law, and yet the redemptive purposes of God be realized. The world is no less divine, if it was produced by natural evolution; the Bible is no less inspired, if it was produced by historical evolution.

Second, it must be remembered that historical circumstances alone are insufficient to explain the appearance of a great thinker. The leaders of human progress have been, it is true, the children of their age, and yet we cannot say that they were wholly its creation. Their age was but a stimulus that called forth a latent power of their souls. They came in the fulness of time—they could have appeared at no other time—and without their peculiar historical situation they would never have brought their message, and yet the historical situation did not make the message. If this be true of the world's poets, philosophers, and scientists, how much more is it true of the Old Testament prophets! Although they found the inciting cause of their thought in their times, yet they attained an insight that the times did not give to other men and that the times alone could not have given to them.

Third, it is to be observed that belief in the inspiration of the prophets does not depend upon the way in which they attained their message, but upon its intrinsic character. The teachings of the prophets in regard to God, duty, sin, and redemption are unique and appeal to us with self-evidencing power as the word of God. If their message were immoral, or trivial and childish, no amount of supernatural machinery in its communication could make us believe it to be the word of God. On the other hand, being what it is, no discoveries whatsoever in regard to its dependence upon history can impair belief in its divinity.

There was a time in the history of the church when some emphasized the humanity of Christ that they denied his divinity, while others were so impressed with his

divinity that they rejected his humanity; but the sound judgment of the church recognized that, hard as it was to conceive, both truths must be held. There are many in our day who are so carried away with the thought of the dependence of the biblical literature upon history that they see only its human side; there are others who feel its divinity so strongly that they are constrained to deny its humanity: orthodoxy holds both truths. The Bible, like the incarnate Word of God, who is its center and of whom it witnesses, is as truly human as it is divine, and to deny the perfect humanity of its origin is as great a heresy as to deny the divinity of its message.



THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION—MURILLO